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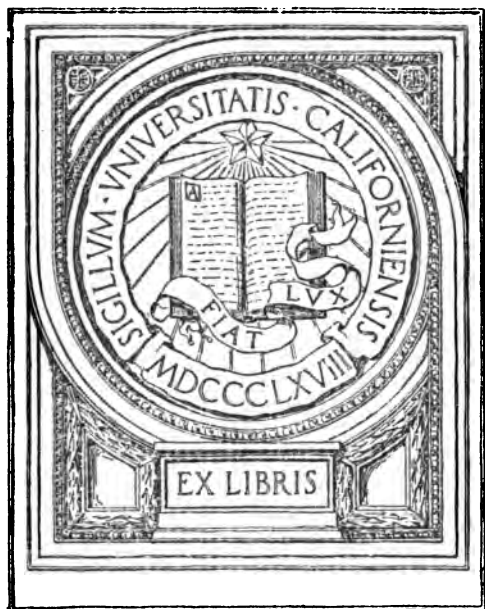


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THE HAPPY BRIDE

THE HAPPY BRIDE

BY

F. TENNYSON JESSE

AUTHOR OF

The Milky Way, Secret Bread
Beggars on Horseback

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA



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I

TO THE
LIBRARY

THE HAPPY BRIDE

[1]

(In Cornwall, when an unmarried girl dies, she is borne through the streets followed by her girl friends dressed in white and singing a hymn of which the refrain is "O Happy Bride.")

ALONG the lane where I passed the faded sorrel shows
rusty,
Naked the wind-wilted thorns crouch by the granite
boulders;
On the day that I buried you, lass, the June sun was
lusty,
Made the new-varnished coffin gleam upon the black
shoulders.
Lie you warmly, my lass, with your head on your lonely
pillow,
You that I was to wed when the pilchard huer's first
"Heva!"
Told that the harvest of fishers made dark the long rippled
billow,
You who'll wed never?

TO MRS
ABRAHAM

Dead before you were mine! As they jolted you up the steep
street
Meaning wedded to Heaven, they hymned you as "Oh
Happy Bride" . . .
Bridal shift was not sewn nor the bridal wreath twisted, my
sweet,
Until you had died.

Lass, I cannot forget you—the one soft curl in the hollow
Dimpling the nape of your neck; the way that the curve of
pink ear
Was half-hid by your hair when you turned to see if I'd
follow,
Then the smile that narrowed your lids when you found I
was near . . .
But—there's Nan to the mill who would have me, come fair
days come wet;
Must I get me no sons for the sake of my pledges to you?
When my hands are too feeble for drawing and tucking the
net,
Then what shall I do?

[illegible]

“Lad you need have no fear that my dead hand will pluck
at the sheet,
Sleep without recking of me and get you children about you,
Thicker than gulls at a haul come flocking the troubles you’ll
meet,
For sons grown to manhood will quarrel and daughters when
fair will flout you.”
What better folk have you here, my lass, grass betwixt you
and the bay,
With the church tower pricking one ear across to the
morn?
“Children I would have brought to you; babes of the spirit
are they
Who never are born.”

May I take Nan and wed with her, never think her your
debtor,
Nor see her cheek pale from the envious breath of the
dead?

“Have her and be glad, for the Happy Bride sleeps with a
better,

Nan you may wed.

’Tis the man that I thought you lies closer to me than a
wraith,
Dreaming with him and his babes I’ll covet no live woman’s
morrow.

Take my wish—that till women forget or till men can keep
faith,

You may miss sorrow.”

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(Legend says that the water of St Ludgvan's Well, in Cornwall, has power to protect from the hangman's rope all children baptised with it.)

CLEAR as drops of blood the currants gleam on the bushes,
Red of poppy and sanfoin winks from the ripening grass,
All the world is stained wine-red by the setting sun—
Redder than any of these is the blood of the man I have killed.

The bell

Of slow-moving cow down-along in the lane, sounds like
A knell.

Let me in, my lass, for fast the evening is falling;
To me the day and the night will soon alike be grey,
Soon the hempen halter will close about my neck—
Lass, to-night let it be your arms that are clinging around it.

He fell

Your name in his mouth—and the mouth of you will haunt
me within

My cell.

Lass, the bed is of quicklime that all too soon will enfold me;
Just to-night may your breast be my more pitiful pillow:
And since the life is vain that can leave no life behind it,
To set a child of mine facing the sun and the winds

I'll sell

My chance of escape—my body to Bodmin jail, and my soul
To hell.

Then on you, who are woman of mine, I'll lay a last bidding—
See the babe is christened in water from Ludgvan's spring;
Never for him will the hangman knot his rope of hemp,
Or you again go in sorrow because of the neck of a loved one.

The well

Of Ludgvan has power; and only for me will sound in a prison
The knell.

IN the hedgerows the young oaks are crumpled beneath the
grey blight;
And the patches of sorrel are like stains of rust in the
corn
Where the long straws lie tangled and flat to the face of the
morn;
In the pasture the yellow destruction of charlock shows
bright.

*Early may his head grow grey,
Sinews and brain come soon to rust;
Broken may he lie his length
For breaking trust.*

IN the copse a young rabbit, bewildered, is mourning his
mate;
By her ear the thin stoat sank his murderous tooth in her
brain,
Startled, fled, but left her half-paralysed, circling in pain,
Her wide eyes blurred by the death-film; struck down by
her fate.

*Even thus may she be felled,
And unkempt her house be left;
Vainly will he sit and call
From hearth bereft.*

*But her babes that should be mine. . .
God knows I cannot wish them ill.
May He from the field-things' fate
Protect them still.*

LET your lids fold, as you lie on my breast,
The song at your ear is mother's heart beating,
 Heavy round head
 Soft is your bed,
And each beat of my heart is for you, my sweeting,
My arms are strong to cradle your rest.

Down-along the dumble-dories¹ are droning,
Shrill the cries of the gulls come over the bay,
 Hear the thin twitting
 Of airy-mice² flitting,
Hear the wind that has followed the sun all day
At each black post set the trapped wires moaning.

From piskies I guard you, little boy-thing,
They'd steal you and tuck you under the turf;
 The merry-maids³
 Who sleek their braids
In the shore-flung crescents of curdled surf,
Around you with wet white arms would cling.

But till the dawn's eyelid shall open wide,
And the grey-bird ¹ scatters with thirsty beak
 Each dew-filled grail
 Of blossom frail;
Till the joy of waking shall dimple your cheek,
Safe as bird in the nest shall you sleep by my side.

Son of my heart, as you lie on my breast,
My shielding palms can feel your heart beating,
 Heavy round head,
 Soft be your bed,
When your mother's no longer your sweeting,
And away from me may you still find rest.

¹ Cockchafters.

² Mermaids.

³ Bats.

⁴ Thrush.

[5] I, NOW AN OLD WOMAN GROWN

I, now an old woman grown,
By the hearthstone sit alone.
Three green graves from the door I see,
One in deep waters is hid from me.

They're graves of men I've laid to rest
Who once were babies at my breast;
He who in deep waters lies
Was joy of my heart and light of my eyes.

Children's children play on the moor,
Peep in bright-eyed at my door;
But I, I sit as one apart,
Speaking only with my heart.

Not the four brave sons I've lost
Fill my dreaming mind the most,
But the girl-child that never came
Although I call on her by name.

She would have been beside me still,
She'd never have gone to mine or mill,
Beneath her roof I should have had place
And seen my motherhood in her face.

Three green graves from the door I see,
One in deep waters is hid from me;
But as by the hearth I sit alone
For one who never lived I moan.

THE night is full of sounds; for from the barn
Comes melancholy hooting of the owls;
The lonely barking of an anxious vixen,
The melancholy barking of a vixen,
Echoes up thinly from the distant barn.

The night is full of colour; round the moon
A burnished halo stains the sky with rust;
On moonlit fields the shadows are edged with light,
On burnished fields the dew refracts the light,
Till the prismatic air seems clear as noon.

The night is full of movement; in the hedge
A hungry stoat chases the new-weaned hare;
A clumsy badger clatters across the road,
A hungry badger whose claws ring on the road,
And the sleek otter parts the slippery sedge.

The night is full of waiting; until the morn
The glowing blind will show a shadow-mother
Awaiting day that bears death for her child;
That glowing day to others will bring a child—
In the next house a soul waits to be born.

THE FORBIDDEN VISION

HIDING his eyes at the whirl of wings
The lad on the moonlit carn crouched low,
For fairy-folk with fiddle and bow,
Danced in the tawny toadstool rings.

The fairy music fell sweet and shrill
Broke light as the froth of white sea-sud,
... It waked strange mischief in his blood,
A pagan thing that would not be still.

First his soul with that music shook,
Then, lighter than laughter and free as love
Yet soft as the note of a homing dove,
It lured his lids up for one look.

Oh, sight of the fairy-folk strikes blind,
But he'd his moment of seeing true,
Ere darkness, to keep the splendour new,
Locked all the vision in his mind!

THE SUN NEVER SHINES ON
THE PERJURED

[8]

THE grey gull swoops from his grey rock home
With never a silver gleam on his wings,
The grey sea breaks into paler foam . . .
I am sick to death of these cold grey things.

There's a chill to me in the brightest June,
The very air is grey as the sea,
I crawl stone-cold in the warmth of the noon,
And never a shadow is cast by me.

Oh, when I swore to the lie that saved
Had I but known how sweet is the sun,
Years of grey prison-walls I would have braved . . .
Through to the gold again I should have won.

(In ancient Cornwall there used to be men called "Droll-tellers" who wandered the country-side telling the old stories or "Drolls" in return for bed and board.)

TAWNY, supple and lank, and lean in the flank,
With his face netted over with carven wrinkles,
'Twould have puzzled you well to have guessed his years.
From his carven lids his eyes shone bright,
He'd the laugh of a child, but a hint of tears
Thrummed through his voice like a string from his fiddle.
—No mere teller of drolls, but a master of souls.

All the Duchy he trod till he knew each clod;
Where the red clay stains the sea so ruddy
That the foam breaks in roses along the strand,
Where the white clay cups the milken pools
Or the wind drifts high the hills of sand.
But the folk had all of them one thing in common—
That aghast they withdrew from anything new.

So, in due reward for his bed and his board
He told them old tales of piskies and buccas,
How across the waste the Wish-Hound wails
Hard on the heels of sin-ridden Tregagle,
How Pengerswick's wife is covered with scales
Snake-like, from too much brewing of hell-broth . . .
And he snared them like birds in the web of his words.

Yet on news they fell prone as dogs on a bone;
When some noted sinner had been converted,
Or some farmer's cow had slipped her calf,
Or a maid they knew of had "met with misfortune."
Then indeed he was sure of raising a laugh,
They almost forgot he was but a foreigner,
And forgave him the sin of having no kin.

But they thought him a wizard when he foretold the Lizard
Would send a bright shaft wheeling over the sky,
And a bell on the Runnell Stone heave on the tide
And the Wolf wink a red eye across to the Bishop.
Women snatched up their babes and men drew aside,
Some deemed him a changeling, some hinted at worse—
Of no Christian breed, they all were agreed.

One day, when inspired and with prophecy fired,
Fast the living words blew from his lips like flames;
And he told how the Duchy would fettered lie
Under ribbons of steel, and enmeshed in wires
Back and forth on whose web would messages fly
Like a shuttle; while from Poldhu out to sea
On the naked air would the messages fare.

Then they arose and they drove him with blows,
But once out of church-town he turned and he faced them,
Tucked his pointed chin on his fiddle and played . . .
Played—and hands grew lax and feet were still,
Only souls fell a-quivering and felt afraid
Of his terrible eyes both sad and mocking,
Then he dropped his fiddle and spake his last riddle.

“Who I am ye would know? It ever was so,
When you stoned prophets and flouted the Oracles.
'Tis enough for you that alone I trudge
One of the lost and wayfaring brothers
Who've a clearness of vision you cannot but grudge,
The greatest of Vagabonds you asked the same question
When He hung on a Cross to save the world's loss.

“ See a god and ye die, and although in a cry
I was whirled from my throne at the birth of a greater,
Like Him I can spare you and keep myself hidden . . .”
—He stamped on the earth, which opened and swallowed him.
For a moment they stood like children chidden,
But on finding the print of a hoof in the sod
They no longer doubted ’twas the Devil they’d flouted.



Down in the village they pointed after Jennifer
Up in the lonely ways hid from her approach;
Feared her glances grey and empty as the dawn.

She was whisht

And fairy-kiss't;

Had given her virginity amid the reddened heather
To a fairy-lover, and had garnered elfin spawn.
Curious, had looked upon and lost her fairy-lover . . .

Jennifer, Jennifer!

So the good wives by the cradle would hastily cover
Their babes' downy heads from the danger of her look,
Or snatch them the closer in a curving arm

Lest changeling brood

Puling in mood,

Born of elf-ridden Jennifer up amid the bracken
Be tucked beneath the coverlet to wreak their harm;
While she stole the christened babes away in her kirtle
Cunningly, cunningly.

And full many a maiden, when the bush of glossy myrtle
Flowered by the cottage door and told she would wed,
Hidden in the attic sewed her bridal shift

Lest Jennifer

Should glance at her,

And the harmless linen carry ill-luck to her body

And sorrow to her husband be all her gift.

Poor Jennifer, heedless, would stare up at the attic

Wondering, wondering.

But many of the old folk, though crippled and rheumatic

Hobbled to the door if she came down the street;

For grown too old for love is too old for fear;

And her wild face

Was touched by grace

Born of lost hope and love, of half-forgotten glory—

Made them remember that to them had love been dear.

For Time always gives to dead youth a fairy lover,

Glamour-seen, glamour-seen.



II

(SAN GIMIGNANO, April.)

CITY of quiet dusk and chill, sweet morn,
Wind-swept and clean from base to cresting roof;
Piercing the sky's blue bubble, serene, aloof,
Your very towers bring peace to minds forlorn.
Here, where Saint Fina to her rest was borne,
Scared nymph-hood still can flee the satyr's hoof;
Blown straight are sorrow's tangled warp and woof,
And like brave pennants by the soul are worn.

No more do angels hover at the towers
Like bees round lilies, about their tucked-in feet
Their fluttered gowns blown crisp against the sky:
But springing from sheer walls, the gilly-flowers
Seem seraph flames above each shadowed street,
Small burning bushes to show that God is nigh.

DROWNED CITIES

[12]

BELOW the green, slow-heaving clarity
Of shrouding waters, lies lost Lyonesse,
Kept clean, inviolate from all distress,
As in a bubble sphere of faery.
Is she still gay with errant minstrelsy,
Shrilled to where some lover and his mistress
Grown webbed and silver-finned, keep joyousness
Bright in this City of Serenity?

Or, where the arras waved, does the brown weed
Sway in the languid breath of underseas,
Down empty streets, dim as forgotten years?
Lost Lyonesse! No deeper drowned indeed
Than Cities of Illusion, whose gilt keys
Lie rusting in the soul's awakened tears.

[13] A LITTLE DIRGE FOR ANY SOUL

SCATTER sad-leaved cypress here,
Hope lies rigid on this bier.
Bring the berries of the yew,
All of bitterness is due
When the joy of life is fled
Ere the body's life be sped.
He who goes with deadened heart
Is set from living men apart.

But where a body quiet lies
With the death-coins on its eyes,
Shed no tear and make no moan
Body's end is there alone,
And the unloosed soul hath breath
With its weary master's death.
... Death in life's a heavy thing—
Life through death doth freedom bring.



A LITTLE CAROL
FOR MOTHERS AND CHILDREN

ABOUT her Babe does Mary
Tuck in the yellow straw,
And warmed by cattle's breath
He smiles upon His mother,
Nor heeds yet any other.
In that little death
When apart your children draw,
Mothers, call on Mary.

And little children, Jesus,
'Twixt dawn and candlelight
Can easy find life tragic . . .
For just a broken toy
May darken all their joy,
And the morning's magic
Be spoiled by the night.
Play with the children, Jesus!

**Praise the Babe of Grief!
No longer joy is vaunted,
Haloed now is sadness.
Sorrow with braided lock,
Want in broidered frock,
Preen themselves for gladness.
You can go undaunted
For god-like now is grief.**

[15] THE VOICES OF THE PASSING YEARS

YOUTH:

Come, Love, come, Love,
I am waiting a-tip-toe.
Come to-morrow or the next day,
Or even on the day after.
There can be nothing further,
That must be the outermost edge!
Come, Love, come, Love,
Gild to-morrow and the two days after;
Come, Love, here is youth so bright—
I am young for your delight.

MATURITY:

Come back, Love, come back, Love,
Where did you slip past me?
Yesterday or the day before,
Or even on the day earlier?
Before I must have been too young,
I could not even have guessed at you . . .
Come back, Love, come back, Love!
Oh, where and how did I miss you?
Come back, Love, I yet am warm,
Soon I shall be too old for harm.

MIDDLE AGE:

Alas, Love, alas Love,
I have never met you.
Always I have looked for you,
Each day until the day after.
Sudden I awakened, Love,
And found you had slipped by me . . .
Alas, Love, alas, Love,
All my time was wasted for you.
Alas, Time, what bear ye
That I have not wasted yearly?

OLD AGE:

Sweet Love, sweet Life,
With you both I've met . . .
Ever did I look for Love
Wilful turned my eyes from Life,
Of a sudden Time awaked me,
Showed that Love and Life are one.
All love of earth and sun and beast
Time has shewn me make Life's feast.

Up the highway, young blood singing,
Chase the rim around the world,
Feathered heels of youth are winging
—All too soon are pinions furled.

Youth is gold in morning light,
Flashes back from leaf and rill,
Gleams in all there is that's bright,
Flies from everything that's still.

Hearts and heads and heels of feather—
These are gifts that will not stay;
They triumph over any weather
But Time will bear them all away.

Some say that on another earth,
Or haply once again on this,
Again as babes we come to birth,
So once more taste our youthful bliss. . .

If it's so, since age we must,
In nerve and sinew, heart and brain,
Let us, ere we fall on rust,
Kill ourselves, to live again!

[17] WHERE BEAUTY STAYS HER FOOT

BEAUTY stings the soul to a sense of something lacking—
Vague desires that set this way and that, for ever racking
Backwards and forwards; always hungry, groping and dumb.
If over a sudden hill-crest a stretch of cloud-chequered land
Lie wide to the wanderer's gaze; he, from his high-thrust rock
Sees it sun-dappled, sees the wind-blown columns of showers
And pearly patches of water; sees hills with a bloom like a
plum

Interfold at the rim of the world . . . And, at the first shock
Of its infinite fairness, still and straight his body will stand
While his soul leaps a-tip-toe, and, yearning for unknown
powers,

**Tugs at the cord of life with a beating of futile wings—
Expanding with what it knows not, urgent for further things.**

In the keen joy of reading a just and debonair phrase,
Of seeing in paint or in stone how beauty is snared in her
ways,
When the subtle smell of sun-warmed or rain-fragrant earth
Makes him close eyes and ears so that his senses may narrow
And fuse in the deep-drawn breath; or music wakes and dies,
Urging and soothing and fretting; then again his soul is set
aching
For beauty beyond that beauty, wider than sorrow or mirth...

Some gold at the foot of the rainbow, some treasure of skies
Stretching too far for the mind's most cunning-plumed
arrow.

The soul pursues it in sleep, but is for ever awaking
Just as its melody, its fragrance and bright-coloured gleam,
Like moths in a net, seem about to be caught in the web of
a dream.

But, when for a long-poised moment that seems to be holding
its breath
Snatching all that it can of life ere Time lets it fall into death,
When the wish of a man and a woman has urged each to each
And in hard silent pressure of passion mouth stays against
mouth,
Then it seems that the void in creation at last may be filled,
Beauty cries out aloud "*This for itself was made fair . . .*
For itself! For itself! For itself!" So she stays within
reach
For one beat of her wings; and, ere the fond soul is chilled
For a moment it tastes in that moment the slaking of drouth,
Beating back on itself as the foam of a wave hung in air
Sinks back on the urgent slope of its upheaved breast—
And Beauty's glimmering foot stays still for one moment
in rest.

III

WHEN may I come again to the Western moors,
Dappled with cloud-shadows and chequered with fields
That grudging the wild earth yields?
My heart is sick for the blown pallor of mists,
For the young-curved bracken and budding heather
And the soft grey weather.
Shall I hear again the wail of the peewits,
Listen once more while the pale-lipped sea of the West
Sings the song that is best?
Wind-swept land whose soul is known to your children,
Spacious sky where clouds from the ocean pack,
How would you welcome me back?

“ If your heart be sick, I will teach it calm,
My soil is a grave for the sorrows with heavy feet,
My mist is their winding sheet.
Again you shall see the blur of blue in the hedge
That tells of the first dog-violets, see the new gold
Of catkins on hazels old.
But never again with a careless heart shall you lie
Where young love once gave shining veils to folly
In that stream-threaded valley.
Dust are the birds whose song seemed of half-shy kissing,
The leaves that embowered you away on the winds are blown
. . . First love also is flown.”

[19]

WHERE MY DEAD YOUTH
LIES DREAMING

Down in the west my dead youth lies dreaming,
There, where I left it when I came to town.
Dead youth, lie still, where I'll always find you
There in the west where the soft rains come down.

Now, when I go there and walk the moors again,
Lay cheek against the granite or limbs on the heather,
My dead youth is more living than the deadening present
And I walk with it again in the grey soft weather.



[20] TO THE FORBIDDEN LOVER

THAT time I gave you half-a-moon of days
In the dear Southern land of many moods,
She lured us up among her hill-ringed ways,
Far from the ordered gardens, far from where,
Sacriling the sky the Christs hang on their roods.
We saw the sea-grey slopes of olive trees
Blown foamy pale; from the cloud-ridden air
Fell the swift shadows on those leafy seas.

To lakes of hardened lava we would come,
Scarred, as by whirlpools, with cold crater-rings,
Or packed in furrows, like mammoth slugs grown numb
At some disaster of creation's dawn—
A burnt-out lunar landscape of dead things.
And then a kindlier whim of path would show
Rocks that might echo to a piping faun,
Or hide a huntress-nymph with spear and bow.

Pan-haunted is the valley where we lay
(Lay, till lulled senses slid into a dream)
Watching sun-wrought reflections of ripples play
And break in shining scales through that green pool,
Deepest of seven strung on a ribbon of stream
Which seven times wings the air in curving flight.
And from the gleaming arc blew spray to cool
Lids that were rosy films against the light.

A hut with fluted roof we found one morn
A fairy-story hut—an empty shrine
Haply once dear to comrades less forlorn
For on the walls were names of lover-folk.
And there we ate our bread and drank our wine,
A Sacrament of Fellowship—only dregs
We poured to envious gods, and laughing broke
Thrush-like, against a stone, our brown-shelled eggs.

Dearest that hill-town set in sun and winds,
Remote as though upon Olympus hung,
Yet with a human tang that drew our minds
To gentle, restful things—an open door,
Warm hearths, silk-curtained beds, and shutters flung
Wing-wide to let us watch the stars pulsating.
—Now through closed slats their light must bar the floor,
And on the hearth the ash be grey with waiting.

And when for daily troubles you make dole
(Now that the miles have set you far away)
Then to our little city come in soul.
There, where the two girl-children thought us wed,
There, surely I need never say you nay . . .
. . . But, where the hollow curves between the breast
And rounded shoulders, draw your weary head,
And, when the day's lid droops, there give you rest.

The weakness of you I can hold to me,
For since at the world's door the babes unborn
Must vainly beat for us—oh, I will be
A Virgin-Mother to the child in you . . .
And comradeship is good when sweetly sworn,
Being no less tender for its commonplace,
And for its lack of fetters no less true.
—Take what you may, my dear, and with good grace.

.
This for his comfort, but, how long, how long
Till utter lack of feeling I attain,
Until the calm he thinks already won
Can really numb me—heart and soul and brain?

THE smell of things is sweet to me;
Of the tender-hued thyme amid the grass,
Of the gorse-blossom hot in the sunshine
And of earth after rain.

The sight of things is joy to me;
Of the gull planing on level plumes,
Of the rainbow hung for a flash in the wave
And the gold of grain.

The sound of things is dear to me;
Of the whimpering wires at the telegraph poles,
Of the barking fox down the valley
And the lark's strain.

But best is the feel of things to me;
Of the chilly wind that blows on my eyelids,
Of wet sand, sunny stones, and sleek grasses,
 Yes, even of pain.

If other senses all die to me,
The world draw in and the gates all close;
Yet will my faithful flesh tell me of rapture,
 So life not be vain.

I HAVE hated

Every moment of the sun by day,

Every moment of the moon at night;

Eating my own heart.

For since you never write me words to ease my hunger

My love unto my love is fain to be phrasemonger.

I have scorned

Myself for my own pain each day,

For every aching nerve at night,

Yet, eager waited

Lest my too-anxious thoughts or pulses' drumming

Should drown the first faint noises of your coming.

I have despised
You more; because I knew each day
And every golden-houred night
You would but want
Easy companioning and easier passion,
Naught keener to disturb and trouble your soul's fashion.

And I have known
When once you came, that in the day
And while I held you through the night,
Again I should forget . . .
Forget just in the nearness of you all my sorrow,
That I ached with it yesterday, and will to-morrow.



IV

[23] THE WEDDING IN THE WOOD

SING hail, hail, hail to the deep-bosomed fleet-footed bride,
See where she comes through the trees with sun-dapples
slipping over her body

In ripples of broken brightness, so that she seems to be
moving

Through the swaying and eddying depths of a current-
whorled river,

Full of bright edges and luminous shadows and beaten-back
refractions.

Sing hail to her long straight legs and the smooth brown
skin that moves sleekly this way and that

Over the knitted muscles as closely as the blown air
Fits over the moving waters, one with each hollow and ripple.

She is wild and chill, reluctant as dawn in winter;
Under each rose-tipped breast a crescent of dove-like shadow
Curves feather-soft; on her limbs and the rounded nape of
her neck

The golden down catches the light, and blurs edges with a
delicate mistiness.

All about her is sane and sweet, touched with the adorable
crudeness of youth, and stung
With a wildness that makes her eye sidelong, her foot poised,
Her body swung forward, and her upward head
Pricked for flight.

So, as he chases her, she flies before him, poising, swaying,
Now erect, now for whole moments slanting, as surely as
 though unseen wings gave her confidence,
Lightly as though she could lean against the air blowing to
 her-wards,

And only leap on as it parts round her body.
He springs from surface to surface and feels the keen joy
Of naked feet fitting themselves over each curve of boulder
and hummock,
The quick muscles responding faithfully to the swell of the
ground,

And the tall body
Poising like a sleek wave for the onward and downward
plunge.

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TO WHOM
IT MAY CONCERN

THE SPARROW AND THE MOTOR-BUS [24]

("In the City yesterday, at the busiest hour, a sparrow was run over and killed by a motor-omnibus."—Daily Paper, 1917.)

THE MOTOR-BUS:

Hark to my clutch go grinding, grinding!

I am big and bright and heavy, with an overpowering smell,
(Listen to the grinding of my gears!)

I'm the terror of the street, both of those upon their feet
(Oh, the grinding, the grinding of my gears!)

And the lighter things on wheels that can easy show their heels,
Yet would never crawl again if but once I hit 'em well.

I'm the ruddy conqueror, I am jolly near immortal!
(Oh, my horn! the blaring of my horn!)

I can make financiers scurry like the snowflakes in a flurry
(Oh, my brakes, the grinding of my brakes!)

While the silly women scuttle back and forth like a shuttle...

That is when I grunt and roar till my very engines chortle!
(Oh, my gears, steady with my gears!)

And when I think of what I could do if I chose to cast off all
restriction,
If I chose to go mad and career hither and thither like a bull
Scorning rhyme and reason...
Why, in a few moments I could wreck Fleet Street!
Is it any wonder that my radiator bubbles with pride?

THE SPARROW:

Cheep! Cheep!
Yer cahn't catch me!
Yer cahn't catch me!
I'll peck a bit o' dirt
From under yer bonnet
And then perch upon it!
(My, it's 'ot!
'Ot as 'ell!
And *what* a smell!)
Yer couldn't catch a flea
And much less me!
Cheep! Che——

THE SENTIMENTAL PASSER-BY:

Ah, by what heedlessness of callous gods
Did the gross miracle happen? He who plods
On life's way sickened by the useless griefs
(E'en at a time when those worth many sparrows
Are falling like scattered seeds into the furrows)
May surely ask of Them Who are our Chiefs?

So vast a weapon for so small a foe!
Absurd calamity! And yet...of woe
Who is the measurer and what the scale?
Lo! in an instant on the asphalt, prone
Lay that which in the moment earlier had flown!
Was there no worth in gaiety so frail?

For what of beating heart or pulse or wing
Can there be left of such a tiny thing?
It gave amidst the din its airy dance
And now's but reddened feathers on the ground,
While, on the tyre a dark patch round and round
Whirls, unchecked for the guerdon of a glance...

THE MOTOR-BUS:

I am the great, the all-powerful!
I killed you! I killed you!

THE SPARROW:

I am the great, the unconquered!
I once lived! I once lived!



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